Written by Kyle Arnoldy
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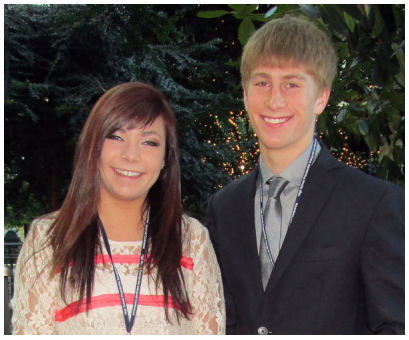
While millions watched on their television sets, HHS students Nicholas Ortner and Alyssa Killin were able to witness the presidential inauguration in person, as they made the trip to Washington, D.C. as a part of the Congressional Youth Leadership Council.

On Monday, Jan. 21, as roughly 900,000 people were in attendance at the West Front of the Capitol to catch a glimpse of American history, the pair was lucky enough to be near the front of the civilian crowd, which they estimated was still about two football fields away from the stage. Luckily there were speakers and screens set up so those farther away could still hear and see the event.

They stood in the chilly January air in the middle of a sea of people for nearly four hours as an emotional crowd shouted and cheered. Although both stated that they had plans to attend regardless of political affiliation and the outcome of the election, they enjoyed the crowd's reaction whenever the president said something particularly important.

Both said being able to witness and be a part of the energy in the crowd was a great experience, one they would do again if the opportunity presented itself.



Alyssa Killin, pictured at left, and Nicholas Ortner recently traveled to Washington, D.C. with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council.

The brevity of the president's speech surprised them, but by the end of the ceremony they were ready to make their way through the densely populated area to get out of the cold and rest.

Their five-day stay was highlighted with the inauguration, but the two were also able to learn a great deal about all of the responsibilities the president has through a number of conferences offered to them from Jan. 19-23. Neither have a desire to enter politics but enjoyed learning the inner-workings of the government while on the trip.

Dr. Condoleezza Rice, former U.S. secretary of state and national security advisor to the president, and General Wesley Clark, former NATO supreme allied commander, four-star general and presidential candidate, were both keynote speakers during the week.

Members of the CYLC were also granted early admittance to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum before the oath of office and inaugural address.

Many screens were present at the inauguration as hundreds of thousands showed up to see the event.

The CYLC provides opportunities for members to grow academically and as a person through leadership programs. Members are nominated by educators based on academic achievement and leadership qualities.

Ortner, a sophomore, has been in the program since he was in sixth grade and Killin, now a junior, joined while she was in seventh.

Aside from the trip to the inauguration, Ortner and Killin have also attended conferences held at the state level. Ortner has also attended conferences in Boston, Mass. and Washington, D.C. once before. During the first trip to D.C., the visit was more focused on touring and gaining information on the numerous monuments in the city.

More than 2,000 CYLC members attended the presidential inauguration.

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